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ABSTRACT

This paper offers suggestions in the form of six guidelines on how the teacher can build toward reading maturity in the classroom. The first guideline urges the teacher to remember that reading necessitates a total complex thinking process, one which will prevent persisting at one level of instruction longer than is necessary. Secondly, students should be encouraged to read at levels appropriate for them and be engaged in activities that will involve them in a greater percentage of actual reading. Furthermore, to keep students from comparing themselves with each other, the teacher should define success so that students have a sense of achievement derived from their individual rates of progress. At the same time, the class should be told the reason for a given activity so that it can share responsibility for learning with the teacher. Another guideline stresses the importance of the language experience approach (e.g., relating reading to real life problems), so that students can use their everyday environment to generate their own reading and look to books as a means by which they can solve some of their problems. It is hoped that with the direct application of these various guidelines, day to day decisions about specific methodologies can be more effective and consistent, and reading skills strengthened. (HS)

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BUILDING STRENGTH IN WORD ATTACK

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During the past few years, early instruction in reading has received major professional emphasis. Consequently, instruction at that level is often quite adequate. Later instruction, however, has not always maintained this same effective pattern of reading growth. What can teachers do to assure a smooth flow of growth in word attack and other reading skills? Since teachers must deal with infinitely complex and ever-changing human problems on a day-by-day basis, there are no simple answers to such a question. One can, however, develop some basic guidelines for viewing problems so that day-by-day decisions about specific methodologies can be more effective and more consistent. This paper simply offers teachers some guidelines for viewing instruction in reading which may help the daily decision making process.

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A first guideline presented for consideration is that growth in reading is fostered best when instruction in reading is considered to be part of a total process. Each day teachers arrange activities which provide one piece in a general growth pattern. They do specific things on a day-by-day basis to build something that, in the mature stages, is a total process. With today's emphasis on behavioral objectives and minute reading skills, it becomes imperative that teachers remember that they are building toward reading maturity -- and that maturity in reading necessitates a total, complex thinking process.

Remembering the total goal helps teachers promote growth in reading that flows smoothly from phase to phase. It reminds them not to commit the cardinal sin in reading, i.e., persisting in instruction at a level longer than it is necessary. This can be illustrated by looking at growth in word recognition. The major goal of instruction in word recognition is to develop in the pupils the ability to recognize instantaneously, using only minimal visual clues, all of the commonly used words in the English language. While progressing toward this goal, the pupil goes through a phase where he needs to look directly at every letter in a word to be able to pronounce it. As times goes on and growth toward the major goal continues, he should see less and less, while perceiving more and more. To encourage him to continue to analyze words longer than necessary would seriously retard his growth in word recognition.

Another guideline which should not be forgotten is that children learn to do by doing, i.e., children learn to read by reading. John Dewey spent a lifetime trying to make this point and yet it is still too easily forgotten. Applied to reading, this guideline means that teachers should include regularly those activities which involves a high percentage of actual reading. How often, for example, do teachers spend more time discussing a story than pupils do in reading it? Or to what extent are dramatizations included as activities in the time set aside for reading? Certainly, discussions and dramatizations have value in promoting reading goals, but in most cases, few children are actually engaged in the reading act while the discussions and dramatizations are in progress. The point is not that we should abandon all dramatizations or similar activities. It is simply that efficiency of instruction is one criterion that should be applied to instruction in reading; sometimes this may mean less physical activity and more direct reading.

A third guideline which closely parallels the second one is that reading should be a success experience. This means that everything, or almost everything, that a pupil does related to learning to read should be something where he has a good chance of success. No teacher should require pupils to do things where they will likely experience failure. The heart of this guideline is simply a continuation of the first. Children learn to read by reading at a level that is appropriate for them. Each child should be reading at his growing edge, i.e., his

"instructional level." He should be reading material that has enough new content to challenge him, but still it is easy enough for him to experience success. In the classroom, as elsewhere, nothing succeeds like success itself.

Following the success guideline, teachers will often have to define success for children. In a success oriented classroom, children should not be encouraged to compare how well they read with how well others in the class read. Someone always comes off second best in such a comparison. It is more appropriate if a pupil is encouraged to compare how well he did today with how well he did last week.

A fourth guideline relates to goal setting. Both the teacher and the pupils should know, in fairly specific terms, why they are engaged in any given activity. This guideline means that there will be pupil-teacher planning; likewise, it means that there will be positive participation of the pupils in their own learning. This positive pupil participation cannot become an immediate reality in a classroom even if the teacher is totally committed to it; children need to practice to be successful at it. Nevertheless, it is important and teachers should aim toward having each pupil share a major responsibility for his own learning.

The concept of the self-generating reader provides another guide-line that is well worth considering. Generally speaking, children are not taught to read; they learn from the environment that teachers and others provide. In the early stages the environment, the activities,

and the lessons that teachers provide are relatively specific to the task of reading. Later on when the pupil has an enriched supply of knowledge and skill to bring to reading, and as the reading task becomes more complex, the environment that the teacher provides is more global in nature, i.e., one that is less specific to the learners needs. Eventually the pupil reaches a point in his learning where he has sufficient skill to use the everyday environment of the school and his own out-of-school activities to learn to read without any direct instruction in reading. At that point he becomes a self-generating reader -- a pupil who is capable of learning to read on his own.

Certainly, one goal of the reading program is to produce self-sufficient readers. In the pursuit of this goal, it may not be feasible to depend on pupils to be self-starters; but at some point in the learning process, it is good teaching to use the pupils' own self-generating ability. It may be necessary to use hand cranks to start the reading process, but is is neither desirable nor wise to be a crank forever.

The last suggestion offered as a guideline for teachers is the idea that instruction in reading should be as closely related to the daily lives of pupils as it is possible to make it. When reading becomes the means by which pupils can solve some real life problems, then it becomes a skill to be sought rather than shunned. The language experience approach has been found to be helpful for beginning reading, remedial programs, developmental programs at various levels, and for

pupils who speak with a dialect different from that of the text. The basic reason for this success is that the approach considers what pupils think and say to be important ideas for discussion, study, and reading. The daily lives of students are the center of attention rather than something to be put aside so that the important task of learning to read can be accomplished.

Summary

Strength in word attack can be built through direct practice in the various word attack skills. In this paper, however, an attempt was made to illustrate the point that word attack can also be fostered by utilizing more general guidelines to shape the daily activities in the classroom. Ideas discussed include pupil-teacher planning, teaching on the growing edge, the self-generating reader, efficiency in teaching, and the success experience.

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